ESSENTIALS OF ISLAM Series

AL SALAT

"Prayer"

By

Dr. MUHAMMAD M. GHALI



1419 - 1998

(19)

ESSENTIALS OF ISLAM
SERIES

«AL-SALAT»
PRAYER

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“ The translation of the Qurânic verses cited here is a mere interpretation of the meaning.”

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is the fourth in a series designed to state as briefly as possible the essentials of Islam.

No questions of history or philosophy have been raised or discussed. The plain truths about Islam have been stated in a clear and concise manner.

It is hoped that people with very little knowledge of Islam will find in this series a direct introduction to the essentials of Islam. It will help even those who want to be initiated into the study of Islam.

"And enjoin upon the people prayers, and be constant therein. We ask not of thee a provision: We provide for thee. And the sequel is for righteousness".

"IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE BENEFICENT,

THE MERCIFUL"

1. *Prayer :*

Muslim scholars speak of two distinct sets of acts for worship. One is usually gone through when the performer is either sitting, reclining or standing. This has been called "*du'â*" (prayer), the verb being "*da'â*" (He called). Another set of devotional acts is that which is accompanied by certain physical movements and prescribed recitations from the Glorious Qurân. Such a co-ordinated performance of bowings, prostrations, and recitations is given the name *salât* (prayers).

Prayers are partly obligatory and partly optional. The obligatory prayers have to be performed at fixed times, five times every day.

2. *Ablution :*

Ablution, or purification, is a prerequisite for the performance of valid prayers. It may be defined as cleansing from material or spiritual pollution.

The conditions for the validity of ablution are :

1) Belief (i.e. being a believer).

2) Being in control of one's faculties.

3) Having attained majority.

4) Ability to use a purifying agent.

5) Availability of a purifying agent.

6) Covering by ablution of all the designated parts.

7) The absence of any pollution which renders it null and void, e.g. the absence of menstruation or a post-natal bleeding in women.

8) Intention.

9) Correct order of ceremonies.

Ablution may be categorised in three ways :

a) Minor Ablution *(wudû).*

b) Major Ablution *(ghusl).*

c) Dry Ablution *(tayammum).*

a) *Minor Ablution :*

The four parts of minor ablution are :[1]

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(1) Other components of wudû', after the Practice of the Prophet, are : washing the mouth, nostrils before washing the face, and the ears after rubbing the head.

1) Washing the face.

2) Washing the hands up to the elbows.

3) Washing the feet up to the ankles.

4) Rubbing of the head.

b) *Major Ablution :*

Major ablution is secured by washing the whole body. It is obligatory after sexual intercourse and after the menstrual period in women.

c) *Dry Ablution :*

Dry ablution consists of wiping the face and the hands up to the elbows on dry clean earth or sand. The worshipper has to beat the earth with his two hands twice, once for wipping the face, and the second time for the hands up to the elbows.

The conditions for a valid dry ablution are :

1) Rubbing.

2) The availability of clean earth, and the absence of water.

3) Covering of all the designated parts. Clean earth may include clean dust, or sand, or rock, for one of the Traditions of the Prophet affirms that : "All the earth has been given me as a place for prayers (Prostration) and as a purifier".

Invalidity of Ablution :

Ablution is no longer valid when any uncleanness is emitted from either of the two openings. An uncleanness may include blood, or bloody saliva, vomiting or a major uncleanness (sexual intercourse).

Ablution, whether minor, major or dry, has been enjoined on believers in the sixth verse of the fifth Chapter of the Qurân.

"O ye who believe, when ye rise up for prayers, wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and lightly rub your heads and wash your feet up to the ankles. And if ye are unclean, purify yourselves. And if ye are sick or on a journey, or one of you cometh from the closet, or ye have had contact with women, and ye find no water, then go to clean high ground and rub your faces and your hands with some of it. Allah would not place a burden on you, but He would purify you and would perfect His grace upon you, that ye may give thanks".

Thus ablution, being a divine injunction makes the cleansing process five times a day a necessary stage of purification before prayers. In the words of one of the traditions of the Prophet : "The key to prayers is purification".

3. *Five Prayers :*

Prayers were instituted when the Prophet (Prayers and God's Peace be upon him) ascended to Heaven after the night journey from the Meccan Mosque to the mosque in Jerusalem, as has been described in the Qurân.

"Glorified be He who carried His servant by night from the Inviolable Mosque to the Far Mosque, the neighbourhood whereof we have blessed, that we might show him Our signs ! Lo ! He, only He, is the Hearer, the one who sees".

This was one year before the Hijra from Macca to Madina. Divine injunctions for prayers have been made to the believers through the Prophet : *"Tell my servants who believe to establish prayers. And enjoin prayers upon thy people, and be constant therein".* The Prophet has also strongly recommended the regular performance of prayers. Many of the traditions specifically deal with this, and the final words he uttered during his last hours on this earth were, "Keep prayers ! Keep prayers ! You will ever keep your solidarity so long as you all pray ! Keep prayers ! Keep prayers !" It is also stated in another tradition that whosoever deliberately omits his prayers because he does not recognize them as a legal duty is to be regarded as an unbeliever. Deliberate omission of prayers constitutes the difference between belief and unbelief. A boy or a girl is asked to pray at the age of seven, and is punished for not performing prayers at ten : "Tell your children to pray when they are seven and punish them for omission (of prayers) at ten".

The conditions for valid prayers are :

1) Purity of body, garments, and place.

2) Covering the private parts.

3) Facing the qibla (direction of prayer).

4) Intention.
5) Correct order of the ceremonies.
6) Humility.

The set times for prayers are at dawn, noon, the afternoon, after sunset, and in the early part of the night.

a) *Dawn Prapers (Fajr) :*

These are two rak'as and the time for performing them is from dawn until sunrise. Recitations from the Qurân are recited in both bowings. The second raka'a includes the "standing prayer" (Qunut) before bowing or before the first prostration "sujud". One final sitting ends these prayers.

b) *Noon Prayers (Zuhr) :*

These consist of four rak'as to be performed any time after mid-day up to mid-afternoon. Recitations from the Qurân are in a low voice. The prayers here include two sittings.

c) *Afternoon Prayers ('Asr) :*

These four rak'as have to be performed between mid-afternoon and sunset. Recitations from the Qurân are in a low voice ; and the number of sittings is two.

d) *Sunset Prayers (Maghrib) :*

"Sunset" prayers are three rak'as to be performed just after sunset until twilight. Recitations from the Qurân are aloud in the first two rak'as ending with the first sitting, but the recitations are in low voice in the third rak'a ending with a second sitting.

e) *Night Prayers (Ishâ) :*

These are four rak as, to be performed from twilight until before dawn. Recitations here, as in the Sunset Prayers, are aloud in the first two rak'as (which end with the first sitting), and in a low voice in the remaining two rak as (which end with the second sitting).

In this, as well as in the preceding three prayers — the third and the fourth rak as have the *Fath'ia* (the Opening Chapter of the Qurân) as the only passage recited.

The five prayers have to be performed at the set times by the believer wherever he may be ; but by preference they should be performed in a congregation. The prayers need not be held in a mosque, but may be celebrated in a dwelling-house or any other place, so long as it is clean. Congregational prayers are valid if the congregation is at least two, one of them being the *imam* (leader) and the other standing slightly behind him to the right.

Omitted prayers have to be made up, so long as the cause is either forgetfulness or sleep.(1)

Additional prayers are frequently recommended, especially during the night.(2)

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(1) Some scholars claim that obligatory prayers have to be made up for by identical obligatory prayers ; others see that only additional prayers can make up for omitted obligatory prayers.

(2) The "Witr" prayers comprise an odd number of rak'as (bowings) recommended to be said privately in order to make the total number of rak'as for the night (like that for the day) an uneven quantity.

The distribution of the rak'as over the five prayers throughout the day is given in the following table :

Name of Prayers	*Before*	*Obligatory (Fârd)*	*After*	*Witr*
1. *Fajr* (Dawn Prayers)	2	2 With *Qunut* (standing prayer)	—	
2. *Zuhr* (Noon Prayers)	2 or 4	4	2 or 4	
b) *Jum'a* (Friday Prayers)	2	2	2	
3. *Asr* (Afternoon Prayers)	2 or 4	4	—	
4. *Maghrib* (Sunset Prayers)	—	3	2	
5. *Ishâ* (Night Prayers)	2	4	2	3 or more

The rak a (or bowing) consists of seven movements with their appropriate recitations :

1) The recitation of "Allah Akbar" (Allah is the Greatest) with the hands open on each side of the face.

2) The recitation of the **Fatiha** (opening chapter of the Qurân), followed in the first two **rak'as** by another passage or passages, while standing upright.

3) Bowing from the hips, the hands placed on the knees.

4) Straightening up.

5) Sliding to the knees and the first prostration with face to the ground.

6) Sitting back on the heels.

7) A second prostration.

In a more detailed form, these movements are as follows :

1) The hands are open on each side of the face with the palms facing the front, very near (or touching), the lobes of the ears. Then the worshipper says : "Allah Akbar". While standing, the hands are usually folded right over left against the front of the body.(1)

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(1) It is also permissible to have the hands downwards beside the thighs.

2) The *Fatiha* is recited, followed by one short chapter (or *sura),* or a passage (several verses) from a long chapter. Next to the *Fatiha* the chapter of "Oneness" is probably the most often recited.

3) Saying "Allah Akbar" (Allah is the Greatest), the worshipper bows down from the hips, with the head and back parallel to the ground. The hands hold the knees, and the worshipper repeats three times,(1) "Glory to my God the Great".

4) Straightening up after ***ruku*** (bowing) comes next. Returning to the upright position, the worshipper says : "Allah hears those who praise Him" followed by **"Our God, to thee be praise"**.

5) *First Prostration :* Then saying "Allah Akbar", the believer prostrates himself on his knees,(2) with the forehead, the nose, and the palms of the hands resting on the ground. Then "Glory to my **God, the Highest" is repeated three times.**(3)

6) *First Sitting :* The head is raised from the first prostration, and the worshipper sits on his heels, with one foot up and the other flat. The back is erect and the hands are in a resting position on the knees.

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(1) It is reported that the Prophet's practice was often more than three.

(2) The knees touch the ground first, and then the hands. In standing up after prostration, the hands are raised before the knees.

(3) Some scholars say that it was the practice of the Prophet to raise his hands near his ears before and after bowing, and at the beginning of every rak'a.

7) *Second Prostration:* Again saying: "Allah Akbar" (Allah is the Greatest) another prostration is performed and "Glory to my God, the Highest" is repeated again three times. With the end of the second prostration, the worshipper says: "Allah Akbar". The observances from the *Fatiha* to the second sitting *(julûs)* inclusisive, constitute a *rak'a*.(1)

The *Fatiha* runs as follows:

1) *Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds.*

2) *The Beneficent, the Merciful.*

3) *Owner of the Day of Judgement.*

4) *Thee (alone) we worship, Thee (alone) we ask for help.*

5) *Show us the straight path.*

6) *The path of those on whom thou hast bestowed Thy grace.*

7) *Not (the path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray.* (Amen).(2)

Two other short chapters are recited after the *Fatiha* in the first two rak'as, one in each:

a) *al-Tawhid* (The Oneness):

1) *Say: He is Allah, the One.*

2) *Allah, the Sustainer of life.*

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(1) The term rak'a is thus used for two different things: a) the specific act of bowing: b) all the ceremonies from the Fatiha to the second prostration.

(2) "Amen" is said after the Fatiha, but is not considered a part of it.

3) *He begeteth not nor was begotten.*
4) *And there is none comparable unto Him.*

b) ***Al - Nasr*** **(The Victory) :**

1) *When Allah's succour and triumph cometh.*
2) *And thou seest mankind entering the religion of Allah in troops.*
3) *Then hymn the praises of Thy God, and seek forgiveness of Him. Lo ! He is ever ready to accept repentance.*

c) ***Al - Tashahhud :***

1) (Bearing witness) is recited in the second, third, or fourth raka'.(1)
2) *Peace be on thee, O Prophet, and the mercy of Allah and His blessings.*
3) *Peace be on us and the righteous servants of Allah.*
4) *I bear witness that there is no god except Allah.*(2)
5) *And I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and messenger.*

In the second sitting of the final rak'a of all obligatory and optional prayers, the following remaining portion of the ***Tashahhud*** **is also recited :**

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(1) This portion of the Tashahhud (Bearing witness) is recited only in the first sitting.

(2) At this point the forefingers of the right hand are raised in a slight movement, a signal of the basic fact of the Oneness of God.

6) *O Allah, assuage Muhammad and the followers of Muhammad.*

7) *As thou didst assuage Ibrahim and the followers of Ibrahim.*

8) *And bless Muhammad and the followers of Muhammad.*

9) *As Thou didst bless Ibrahim and the followers of Ibrahim in the worlds.*

10) *Surely, Thou art the Praised, the Glorious.*

Then follows an optional recitation of the following prayer from the Qurân :

"Our God ! Cause not our hearts to stray after thou hast guided us, and bestow upon us mercy from thy Presence. Lo ! Thou, only Thou art the Bestower."

The formal part of the prayers is completed by turning the head first to the right, and then to the left, saying in each case : "Peace be upon you and the mercy of Allah".

Congregational Prayers :[1]

a) The five prayers are preferably performed in a mosque. For each of these prayers a call to prayer *"Adhân"* is made by the *"mu'adhdhin"* (caller). The leader of the congregation conducts the prayers. He stands in front, the remainder forming straight lines behind him, all standing shoulder to shoulder and foot to foot. When

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(1) A late - comer to congregational prayers has to start with the takbira saying "Allah is the Greatest" and to conform closely to the leader until the prayers come to an end. Then he rises to make up for what he has missed.

the congregation is ready to begin the prayers, the *"mu'adhdhin"* calls the *Iqâma* (a short Adhân) signalling that the prayers are ready to commence.

Certain conditions have to be fulfilled before a person could be chosen to lead the prayers. An *"Imam"* usually should be a male believer in full control of his faculties who is efficient at the recital of the Qurân.

The *("muqtadi"* or *"ma'mûm")* follower of the leader in prayers should so discipline his movements as to follow the leaders closely. The follower is also under the obligation to correct the leader during his recitation of the Qurân if anything escapes the leader's memory.[1]

b) Friday Prayers : "Jum'â" or Friday prayers are weekly congregational prayers performed at noon. They consist of two rak as instead of the usual four on week days, the recitation from the Qurân by the leader is aloud.

Friday prayers were instituted in the first year of the Hijra by the Prophet in the mosque of Banû Salem Ibn Owf on the 16th of Rabi Al-Awwal.

They are considered obligatory for every believer, who is neither sick nor at a journey. A sermon should precede the prayers, and the congregation should not be less than four, including the *Imâm.*

The Qurân orders the suspension of work during Friday prayers'. *"O ye who believe! When the call is heard for prayers on Friday, hasten to remembrance of Allah and leave your trading".*

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(1) The follower may also say : "Subhan Allah" (Glorified is Allah) if the leader has forgotten anything essential to the validity of prayers. A woman may clap her hands for correction.

Other Prayers :

a) Feast Prayers : On the first morning of each of the two feasts: the Feast of the Breaking of the fast *(I'd al-Fitr)* and the feast of the sacrifice *(I'd al-adḥâ),* congregational prayers are held. They are performed just after sunrise and they consist only of two rak'as. Although these are similar to Friday prayers they are different in that in the first rak'a before the *Fatiha* seven *"takbirat"* (Allah is great) are said, as well as five *"takbirat"* in the second *rak'a.*

b) Curtailed prayers are enjoined on the believers. *"When ye journey about the earth, it is no sin for you to curtail your prayers if you fear that those who disbelieve may attack you".*

c) Other prayers have been reported as being the Prophet's practice on different occasions, the most worthy of these to be mentioned here being prayers for a dead person. This is a form of prayer without bowing or prostration, and the prayers here being, in fact, a form of *du'â.*

THE MEANING OF PRAYERS

1) Prayers are a form of worship, the expression both of praise and of supplication. Those who hymn the praise of the Giver and Sustainer of life in prayers realize that it was not mere coincidence that prayers were established when Muhammad was nearest to Allah. The tradition of the ascension reports that during that night five prayers were enjoined and that these five prayers equalled

fifty in worth and reward. For the believer, prayers provide the opportunity for the glorification of the Giver of all good and of all Mercy of His grace and His bounty. Convinced of the wonderful glories of the Creator, the human being yearns for more of His mercy. Most of all he requests guidance to the straight path. For this his only means is obedience, it is not blind obedience, but obedience with vision that transcends the physical limitations of human nature.

2) With praise and supplication the believer achieves a deep sense of satisfaction, derived from the fact that the Bestower of Life and Death is so near that he can be in His presence any time of day or night. In this prayers are a normal vital act by which the little island of our personality suddenly discovers its situation in a larger whole of life. This may explain the Prophetic address to Bilâl, when the Prophet directed him to call for prayers at a time of distress, "Let us now have comfort in prayers." It was also this deep sense of relief that made the Prophet at times stay so long in one bowing or a single prostration that some of his followers suspected that the Prophet might have forgotten that he was praying. It was also this realization of one's nearness to Allah through prayers that minor discomforts in prayers were actually a source of pleasure. Authentic traditions report that the Prophet used to pray so often on winter nights that his feet became swollen. Asked why he exerted himself so tirelessly in prayers, he answered : "Am I not a thankful servant ?"

Again, this pleasure derived from prayers and the easy access to His Presence illustrate a unique

characteristic of Muslim worship. It is the fact that "each human being is his own priest". The only time taken to prepare oneself for this spiritual journey is usually the time for the performance of ablution.

3) The heart of prayers is humility. The Qurân says: *"Successful indeed are the believers who are humble in their prayers."* Like every devotional act, prayers have their ceremonies starting with ablution ; but these ceremonies do not form the basic experience in praying. What really counts is the devotional state of the worshipper. "Their flesh and their blood reach not Allah, but the devotion from you reached Him".

On the authority of Muâdh Ibn Jabal, it is reported that the Prophet said : "It is not one sixth nor one tenth of a man's devotion which is acceptable to Allah, but only such portion thereof as he offers with understanding and true devotional spirit"

Praise and supplication can only properly be offered to the Creator with a deep sense of humility. It is humility that is engendered by the insistence of Islam on the clear line of demarcation between what is human and what is Divine. One of the practices of the early Muslims to achieve this was to concentrate fully on recitations from the Qurân in prayers. That may be one of the reasons why they recited so much of the Qurân while praying. Some of them did actually recite hundreds of verses in one ***rak'a.***

4) However paradoxical it might appear, from this sense of humility is derived a feeling of human dignity, dignity in seeing through forms and creatures the visible Hand of God. This seems to be a common feature in all religions,

and it appears to be the only significant explanation of the spirit of martyrdom in the history of religions. At a time when life and death are equated, it is easy to choose life in death. With humility, there is a real sense of freedom from fear of anything and everything save Allah's anger and it is this freedom from fear that is basic to any real sense of human dignity.

5) The physical movements in prayers are also important. With the sense of humility implied by making some of the noblest parts of human body touch the ground, these movements are also directed to a single spot, which is central to Muslim worship as a whole. All worshippers face the "*qibla*" of prayer in Macca and this, by itself, is a unifying factor in a religion whose two basic pillars are Oneness and unity : Oneness of Allah, and the unity of both Prophethood and of the human race as a whole.

6) There is perhaps nothing more indicative of the sense of equality that Islam insists on than the sight of a Muslim congregation at prayers. Discrimination, racial and social, does not exist and no agency has done this more effectively than the mosque. Distinction of race and nationality exist in Islam only for purposes of identification, but they do not lead to discrimination. The institution of prayers had been from its very beginning one of the means of welding all the different tribal and social sections of the Madinese community together. The Muadhdhin was Bilal, the Abyssinian. This sense of equality in the face of Allah is the proper mechanism for engendering a social consciousness that takes its strength from human brotherhood, and brotherhood paves the way for real love.

7) From the *Fatiha* which is to be recited in every *rak'a* of prayers the following concepts are worthy of note :

1) The universe is of a complex system.
2) Man is not the centre of the universe.
3) This life is one stage in man's journey to eternity.
4) Nobody and nothing beside Allah is worthy of worship.
5) Nobody and nothing beside Allah can give us real help.
6) There is only one straight path, that of the believers, all other paths lead nowhere.
7) The straight path is that of a long line of Prophets and messengers.
8) Knowledge and disobedience do not lead to the straight path.
9) Mythology cannot be a substitute for true religion.

Tashahhud :

The bearing witness or "*Tashahhud*" also contains certain affirmations :

1) Allah is the source of good, and everything good goes to Him.
2) Peace falls upon real belief.
3) The unity of believers.
4) The unity of Prophethood from Ibrahim to Muhammad.
5) The Oneness of Allah, Muhammad being His messenger and servant.

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